



**Washington State Fish Advisory For Mercury
Talking Points
April 12, 2001**

Recently, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) warned against eating certain large, long-lived predator fish due to high levels of mercury. The Washington State Department of Health (DOH) and the health agencies of several other states also advise women of childbearing age and children under six to limit the amount of tuna they eat for the same reason. Too much mercury can have health impacts on everyone, but women of childbearing age and children under six are especially at risk.

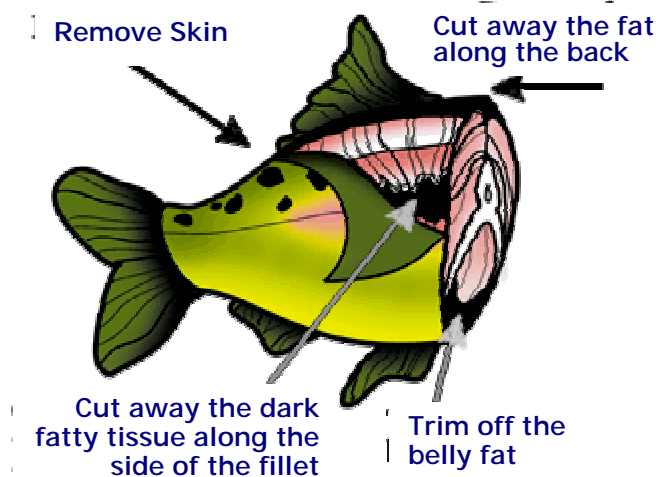
It is important that our messages reinforce the tremendous health benefits of eating fish while balancing those messages with specific warnings about mercury in certain fish.

- Fish is a healthy food, and the Department of Health recommends that people eat a variety of fish as part of a balanced diet. Health benefits of eating fish are:
 - Fish is an excellent low-fat food, a great source of protein, vitamins and minerals.
 - The oils in fish are important for unborn and breastfed babies.
 - Eating a variety of fish helps to reduce your chances of stroke or heart attack..
- Methylmercury is the kind of mercury that is commonly found in many kinds of fish, especially large fish that eat smaller fish and fish that live long lives. Because of health concerns due to high levels of methylmercury in certain fish, DOH advises women of childbearing age and children under six:
 - Do not eat any shark, swordfish, tilefish, king mackerel, or either fresh caught or frozen tuna steak.
 - Limit the amount of canned tuna you eat, based upon your bodyweight. Guidelines are:
 - Women of childbearing age should limit the amount of canned tuna they eat to about one can per week (six ounces). A woman who weighs less than 135 pounds should eat less than one can of tuna per week.
 - Children under six should eat less than one half a can of tuna (three ounces) per week. Specific weekly limits for children under six range from one ounce for a child who weighs about twenty pounds, to three ounces for a child who weighs about sixty pounds.
- Women who are or who may become pregnant, and parents of children under six should be especially aware of this information, although mercury can cause health problems for everyone.
- Health problems caused by mercury are:
 - Babies of women who eat fish contaminated with large amounts of mercury when pregnant are at greater risk for changes in their nervous system. These changes can affect their ability to learn.

- In adults, mercury can lead to problems of the central nervous system and possible adverse effects on the cardiovascular system.
- Mercury contamination is a worldwide problem. It can come from many sources:
 - It occurs naturally in the environment in rocks, soils, water, and air. Mercury may be released into the environment as a result of volcanic activity.
 - It can come from industrial pollution, especially the burning of coal and other fossil fuels and from burning household or industrial wastes.
 - Mercury released into the air settles onto oceans, lakes, and rivers where it is absorbed by fish.
- Mercury is bound to fish muscle, so it cannot be reduced by cutting off the skin or preparing fish in any special way.

Other Contaminants and Local Fish Advisories

- There is not a lot of information statewide on mercury contamination on fresh water fish. We do know on a national basis that bass, pike, and walleye tend to have higher levels of mercury than other species.
- Contaminants other than mercury may be a problem for fish in certain areas of the state. But unlike mercury, the amounts of contaminants like PCBs and many pesticides are stored mostly in the fat of fish, and so they can be reduced by preparing it in ways that reduce the fat.
- Prepare your fish according to the diagram below, then broil, grill, or bake it on a rack so the fat drips off the fish. Do not use the drippings for sauces or gravies.



- Learn more about "Fish Advisories" in your location by contacting your local health department or through the DOH website at www.doh.wa.gov/fish.
- The DOH contact for questions about this advisory is Dave McBride. He can be reached by phone at (360) 236-3176 or 1-877-485-7316 or through e-mail: dave.mcbride@doh.wa.gov.

Canned Tuna Weekly Consumption Rates
Bars indicate the weekly limit of canned tuna for women of childbearing age and children under six as recommended by Washington State Department of Health 4/12/01

